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ABSTRACT

This study examined the attitudes toward gay men and lesbians among male and female undergraduate students and graduate students at Bowling Green State University (Ohio). The subject pool included 99 students between the ages of 18 and 48. The sample included 47 males, 52 females, 60 undergraduate students, and 39 graduate students. A questionnaire measuring attitudes toward gay men and lesbians was administered to the subjects. Two-way analysis of variance was used to determine significant relationships between the independent variables, gender, level of education, and the combination of the two factors, and the dependent variable, the homophobic scale. Although a significant relationship between the level of education and the combination of gender and the level of education failed to be found, gender did seem to affect the final score on the homophobic scale. Specifically, males tend to hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than females. Though the results suggest that gender plays a role in attitudes toward homosexuals, the study did not find the reasons behind this result. The survey instrument is attached. Contains 15 references. (Author/LSR)

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Running head: ATTITUDES TOWARD GAY MEN AND LESBIANS

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Comparison of Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbians Among Students at Bowling Green State University

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Abstract

This study examined the attitudes toward gay men and lesbians among male and female undergraduate students and graduate students at Bowling Green State University. The subject pool included 99 students between the ages of 18 and 48. The sample included 47 males, 52 females, 60 undergraduate students, and 39 graduate students. A questionnaire measuring attitudes toward gay men and lesbians was administered to the subjects. Two-way ANOVA was used to determine significant relationships between the independent variables, gender, level of education, and the combination of the two factors, and the dependent variable, the homophobic scale. In conclusion, although a significant relationship between the level of education and the combination of gender and the level of education failed to be found, gender did seem to affect the final score on the homophobic scale. Specifically, males tend to hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than females.

Comparison of Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbians Among Students at Bowling Green State University

Homophobia, defined as the "persistent and irrational fear of homosexuality" (Croteau & Morgan, 1989) or "anti-homosexual prejudice" (Van de Ven, 1994), has existed for centuries. Only during the recent decades, however, has homophobia been in-depthly studied. This fear and negativity of homosexuality facilitates the discrimination, prosecution, and intolerance of gay men and lesbians. Throughout the last decade, some of the nation's universities measured the occurrence of negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians among their students. While a number of studies comparing the genders exist, few studies comparing the genders in addition to the level of education, undergraduate students verse graduate students, have been conducted at a rural Midwestern college campus. Thus, this study seeks to measure the attitudes toward homosexuality among male and female undergraduate and graduate students at the rural setting of Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio.

For centuries, gay men and lesbians have dealt with prejudice, stereotyping, myth, and misconception about their lifestyles. Due to these negative attitudes and beliefs, gay men and lesbians have often been persecuted and oppressed by the heterosexual majority. Although most studies find gay men and lesbians comprising close to ten percent of today's population (Schaecher, 1989), much of the general public still

seems to harbor negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. The manifestation of homophobia can be found in several different facets of American society including the military and the institution of marriage. Such an example of homophobic prejudice present within today's American society is the recent reported increase in crimes against gay men and lesbians (Harry, 1990). To further demonstrate the extent of prejudice toward gay men and lesbians, the judicial system, despite this increase in hate crimes, still continues to give lighter sentences to these anti-gay men and -lesbian criminals than to criminals who commit similar crimes against heterosexuals (Minkowitz, 1992). One specific group accounts for most of this violence against gays: late teen-age and early twenty-year old men (Harry, 1990).

The finding that men tend to commit more anti-gay crimes than women does not seem very surprising according to research comparing homophobia between the sexes. Researchers found that males tend to hold more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than females (Britton, 1990; Herek, 1984); and, according to Kurdek (1992), males also demonstrate greater hostility toward gay men and lesbians than females which may help account for the anti-gay crimes committed by males. Evidence suggests that other groups, in addition to males, tend to hold negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. These groups who also show homophobic tendencies include people who are older and less well educated (Britton, 1990; Herek, 1984). Specifically, some research conducted at Midwestern universities found gender

differences in attitudes toward gay men and lesbians among their undergraduate students (Pratte, 1992). At other universities, researchers interested in the comparison of level of education and homophobic beliefs found that "education attainment has...shown to be inversely related to homophobia" (Van de Ven, 1994). Understanding the impact of homophobia, we set out to measure the attitudes toward gay men and lesbians among the students at Bowling Green State University. Based upon previously mentioned research results, it is predicted that males will tend to hold more negative attitudes toward and gay men and lesbians than females; and, undergraduate students will hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than graduate students.

Method

Participants

The subject pool comprised of 99 undergraduate and graduate students between the ages of 18 and 48 (M= 25.08, SD= 6.68) enrolled at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. The breakdown of gender is as follows: 47 males and 52 females. The following is the breakdown for levels of education: 60 undergraduate students and 39 graduate students.

Materials

A twenty item likert questionnaire designed to identify possible negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians was developed and administered. Examples of the negative attitudes included justification of hate crimes against gay men and

lesbians, banning gay men and lesbians from military service, and lack of association with gay men and lesbians. In addition, participants were asked to complete some demographical information which included age, gender, level of education, and sexual preference. For an example questionnaire and demographical sheet see Appendix A. All participants filled out identical questionnaires and demographical information. Each item offered a choice of four responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. To help validate the questionnaire, some questions were reverse scored (see Appendix A). In efforts to establish the validity of the items, the questionnaire was administered to two gay men who regarded the questions as valid. Using the Cronbach Alpha computation, this measure's reliability was 0.89. To score the twenty items, each response was given a numerical value ranging from 1 to 4 with the more positive response receiving 4. Total scores were broken down and analyzed on a 1 to 4 scale, with 1 classified as homophobic, 2 as slightly homophobic, 3-4 as not homophobic, or more positive and accepting attitudes.

Procedure

The experimenters administered the surveys and demographical sheet to randomly selected classes from a variety of fields and asked each student to complete both sheets. The total amount of time to administer the measures took approximately 10 minutes. Once the participant finished, the questionnaire and demographical sheet were returned together.

Results

To determine if a relationship between gender and/or level of education with negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians exists, the study utilized two types of statistical analyses. First, descriptive statistics were performed upon the two independent variables, gender and level of education, indicating the total mean and standard deviation based upon the homophobic scale for each subgroup. Second, inferential statistics were used to determine the amount of variability between the factors and the dependent variable, the homophobic scale.

The application of descriptive statistics to the gender factor found these score breakdowns: males (M=2.73, SD=.46) and females (M=3.08, SD=.51). The following indicates the results found for the different levels of education: undergraduate students (M=2.89, SD=.55) and graduate students (M=2.94, SD=.46).

The data was further analyzed using the 2x2 ANOVA with gender and level education as the two independent factors and the score on the homophobic scale as the dependent variable. It was hypothesized that the 47 male students would hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than the 52 female students. In addition, the 60 undergraduate students would hold more negative attitudes than the 39 graduate students. The results indicated that a significant difference using gender (r=.0007, $p<.05$) as a factor appeared while neither level of education (r=.79, $p<.05$) nor the combination of gender and level

of education (r=.20, p<.05) produced any significant difference for the 99 participants. The results of this study suggest that males at Bowling Green State University tend to harbor more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than females. For the calculations of the F Ratio table, refer to Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Discussion

The hypothesis predicted that males tend to hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than females as well as undergraduate students will hold more negative attitudes toward these groups of people than graduate students. Although results suggest that a significant relationship between gender, specifically males, and negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians exists at Bowling Green State University, the findings did not lend support for the variable of level of education. No evidence of a significant relationship between the level of education and negative attitudes toward homosexuality resulted. Although this finding fails to support the notion that people who are less well educated tend to harbor more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Britton, 1990; Herek, 1984), the results may be limited by the small number of graduate students (39) surveyed in comparison to the amount of undergraduate students (60).

Other limitations of this study may relate to what the

designed questionnaire was actually measuring. Most likely our questionnaire was measuring only negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians which may not actually indicate homophobia or the fear of homosexuality at all. However, we do believe that negative attitudes tend to facilitate prejudice. And, by using the definition of homophobia as "anti-homosexual prejudice", we believe that this survey may be measuring some homophobic tendencies. To ensure that we are measuring homophobia, in addition to negative feelings in the future, other surveys such as the Affective Reactions to Homosexuality Scale (Ernulf & Innala, 1987) and the Homophobic Behaviour of Students Scale (Van de Ven, 1994) should be administered along with our questionnaire.

In addition, some specific statements on the questionnaire proved questionable. Thus, adding more limitations to this study. The first statement in question was: "I would feel more comfortable around lesbians than gay men." Statistical results indicated that this statement did not significantly correlate with the total score on the homophobic scale. We believe our questionnaire would be more reliable if this question was thrown out. The second statement in question was: "Homosexuality has become too much of an issue in this country." This statement negatively correlated with the total score. This may be due to the ambiguous wording of the statement allowing many different interpretations. If the statement was reverse scored, the statement also may have proven more reliable.

This statement should be rewored or thrown out. The final statement in question, "I have no problem with a man and woman holding hands in public", also did not significantly correlate with the total score. Rather than include this question in the scoring, we believe it should have been used solely as a validity check against the questions: "Lesbians shouldn't hold hands in public." and "I feel that two gay men holding hands in a public place is acceptable." This statement was not measuring homophobia as we defined it, but addressing the participant's feelings toward public display of affection in general. Therefore, because the statement does check the validity of other statements on the questionnaire, it should remain on the questionnaire but not be scored.

Although no significant date was obtained by using level of education, results did indicate that males at Bowling Green State University did exhibit more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than females. Researchers have examined some possible reasons for this pattern. Specifically, due to the perception that gay men and lesbians do not follow traditional sex roles (Laner & Laner, 1979, 1980), people who value such sex roles tend to demonstrate negative attitudes toward gays (Newman, 1989). Oliver and Hyde (1993) found that males judge sex role deviation harsher than females. These findings may help explain the fact that the male students at Bowling Green State University tend to hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than the female students.

Our results suggest gender plays a role in attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. The study, however, did not find the reasons behind this result. Some researchers argue that gender role attitudes rather than gender dictate the attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Kerns & Fine, 1994). Because our study did not measure gender role attitudes, it may prove that in fact gender does not indicate negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians at Bowling Green State University. We believe that more detailed research needs to be continued in the area of why homophobic attitudes and prejudice exists. Only once we understand the reasons for homophobia, can we begin to combat it effectively.

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Appendix A

The purpose of this study is to examine attitudes and beliefs toward homosexuality among students attending Bowling Green State University. Please answer each question openly and honestly. If you have any questions or concerns about the actual study, the questionnaire, or would like to know the results, you may contact Jennifer Nicoloff or Trisha Manning through the graduate counseling program in the Department of Educational Foundations and Inquiry office at 372-7322. Please leave a message and we will return your call. Thank you for your participation in this research project.

Jennifer Nicoloff
Trisha Manning

Please answer the following demographical questions.
Circle the correct response where appropriate.

1. Male Female

2. Undergraduate Graduate Student

3. Age_____

4. Sexual Orientation/Preference_____

please go to page 2.....

**The term "HOMOSEXUALITY" is used loosely throughout this questionnaire and refers to both gay men and lesbians.

Please circle the appropriate response to EACH QUESTION following this scale:

1=STRONGLY DISAGREE 2=DISAGREE 3=AGREE 4=STRONGLY AGREE

1. I know one or more homosexual people.

1 2 3 4

2. I feel comfortable being around or associating with homosexuals.

1 2 3 4

* 3. Homosexuality is a sin.

1 2 3 4

4. I feel that two gay men holding hands in a public place is acceptable

1 2 3 4

* 5. Hate crimes against homosexuals are justified.

1 2 3 4

* 6. I am uncomfortable with homosexuality.

1 2 3 4

7. I support the gay rights movement.

1 2 3 4

8. Homosexual couples engaging in sexual relations in private is fine.

1 2 3 4

* 9. I would feel more comfortable around lesbians than gay men.

1 2 3 4

*10. Lesbians shouldn't hold hands in public.

1 2 3 4

11. Homosexuality has become too much of an issue in this country.

1 2 3 4

12. Homosexuals deserve the right to have legal marriages in all states.

1 2 3 4

* 13. I would rather not associate with homosexuals.

1 2 3 4

go to last page.....

1=STRONGLY DISAGREE 2=DISAGREE 3=AGREE 4=STRONGLY AGREE

14. I have no problem with a man and a woman holding hands in public.

1 2 3 4

* 15. It bothers me to see gay couples portrayed in movies or on TV.

1 2 3 4

* 16. Homosexuals should be banned from military service.

1 2 3 4

17. I would question family or friends who told gay jokes in my presence.

1 2 3 4

* 18. Homosexual behavior in public or private is intolerable.

1 2 3 4

19. I avoid close relationships with people of my own sex so no one thinks I am gay.

1 2 3 4

20. I don't consider myself homophobic.

1 2 3 4

THANK YOU!!!!!

Note: * indicates statements that are reverse scored.

Table 1

F-Table for the Gender, Level of Education, and Gender and Level Combined Variables

SOURCE	DF	TYPE I SS	MEAN SQUARE	F VALUE	PR F
Gender	1	2.9983143	2.9983143	12.49	0.0006
Level	1	0.0044553	0.0044553	0.02	0.8919
Gender*Level	1	0.4031165	0.4031165	1.68	0.1982

SOURCE	DF	TYPE III SS	MEAN SQUARE	F VALUE	PR F
Gender	1	2.3290425	2.3290425	9.70	0.0024
Level	1	0.0164295	0.0164295	0.07	0.7942
Gender*Level	1	0.4031165	0.4031165	1.68	0.1982